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ABSTRACT

Based upon the experiences of Black Hawk College (BHC), this two-part report presents guidelines for the effective administration of the meetings of a college's board of trustees. The report first discusses board composition and argues that large boards only complicate and slow down the decision-making process. Specific board responsibilities are then enumerated, and BHC's orientation program for new board members is described. The responsibilities and desirable characteristics of a board's chairperson are then outlined as they relate to conducting meetings and fostering the cooperation of all board members. The report then examines the need for policy statements, regulations, data, and documents that can assure consistency in board administration, and concludes with a discussion of the trustee's role. The second section of the report focuses on the methods used at BHC to prepare for and conduct board meetings. Issues to be considered in agenda development are considered first, including the realization that other college groups, such as advisory committees and faculty associations, may be better suited to making decisions in certain areas. The rationale for the monthly meeting schedule of BHC's board is presented prior to an outline of the agenda system, which incorporates a fixed schedule and a color coding scheme, to facilitate its use. Finally, the report discusses the use of executive and special sessions. (JP)

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BETTER BOARD MEETINGS IN LESS TIME

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Better Board Meetings in Less Time

Ray Botch, Member, Board of Trustees, Black Hawk College

Brief, effective board meetings are a composite of many influencing factors. They include:

(1) The size, composition, attitude, and orientation of individuals on the Board of Trustees.
(2) The Chairperson of the Board, including leadership qualities, knowledge of the Chairperson role, and personal characteristics needed.
(3) The existence of significant, well established policies, procedures, and guidelines which serve as a framework or road map guiding operations of the college.
(4) The actual agenda development, the presentation process and the conduct of Board meetings, including parliamentary procedures, order of business, the participatory role of the administrative staff, handling of citizen comments and complaints, the physical facilities and the use of aids such as speaker equipment, projectors, black boards, etc.

I will be talking about the first three factors which influence the effectiveness of Board meetings.

My fellow Board member, Janet Cartwright, will discuss the last item dealing with specific aspects of effective Board meetings, including the agenda and supporting materials and techniques and procedures followed in agenda development and the conduct of the Board meetings.

Board Composition

Our Board is composed of seven members elected at large for three year overlapping terms, with three members elected one year and two members elected in each of the following two years. An eighth non-voting student member is selected by the student body for a one-year term.

We believe the seven person Board has proven adequate to provide a good cross section of the district, yet small enough to permit the business-like expeditious conduct of college affairs. We believe that large boards can be slow, cumbersome, and unweildy, thus complicating and slowing the decision making process, and necessitating the need for standing committees. Our Board is opposed to the concept of standing committees. Temporary ad hoc committees are infrequently used to deal with special problems. The non-voting student member provides input from the student body, and a two-way channel of communication and liaison between the Board and the student body.

Board Role and Responsibilities

The responsibilities of our Board are spelled out in part by the Illinois State statutes. They are basically five in number:

(1) Policy Making, including adoption of necessary policies, rules and regulations for the management and governance of the college.
(2) Community Relations to insure that the community is informed regarding college programs and activities.
(3) Personnel and Organization Administration, including basic personnel policies relative to compensation, performance appraisals, and terms of employment; appointment of the President; approval of appointments of the professional staff; and approval of the administrative organization.
(4) Financial Administration, including approval of the budget, establishment of policies relative to award of contracts; monitoring of the annual budget; approval of expenditures; providing necessary revenue for operation of the college; and providing for the annual audit of financial operations.
(5) Program and Curriculum Administration, including the establishment of appropriate goals and objectives, consistent with local needs; establishment of new units of instruction, research, and public service; monitoring progress toward accomplishment of established goals and objectives; and adoption of policies for admission of students.

Board Orientation

To enable Board members to fully understand their role and responsibilities and thus become active, productive participants in carrying out the Board responsibilities, new Board members are provided an extensive orientation program. Each mew member is provided with copies of:

-Legislative regulations relative to Illinois community colleges
-the Board Policy Manual
-the current annual budget
-the latest annual audit
-the college catalog for each campus
-schedule of classes
-the latest Annual Report
-the Faculty and classified personnel handbook
-student handbooks
-Handbook of Administrative Guidelines, Rules and Regulations
-the Master Plan for Postsecondary Education in Illinois
-Minutes of the Board for the preceding 12 months.

New Board members are also urged to meet with the Board Chairperson, President and Vice Presidents to discuss the Board's responsibilities, current activities of the college, college problems, programs, goals and priorities. Also included is a tour of college physical facilities.

It should be obvious that the early days for a new trustee call for a considerable amount of time and effort. It should also be obvious that with such an orientation program, the new trustee is soon ready to assume an active role in the deliberations of the Board, and thus, time spent during regular Board meetings to orient the new member is minimized. This becomes an important factor in being able to conduct Board meetings in an orderly, expeditious manner.

Role of the Board Chairperson

One of the keys to effective Board meetings is a Chairperson who clearly understands the art of conducting a meeting. Here are some of the things which should be expected of the Chairperson in this regard:

1. In cooperation with the College administrative staff, the Chairperson participates in planning the agenda and the materials to be presented.
2. Setting the stage for and starting the meeting.
3. Stimulating discussion - getting everyone to take part.
4. Guiding the discussion - keeping it on track.
5. Keeping the spotlight on valuable contributions - preventing side-tracks.
6. Using tact and friendly discipline in handling "problem members" and sensitive issues.
7. During the meeting, the Chairperson controls and serves as the focal point in relationships between the staff and the Board, and between the Board and the public.
8. Guiding and controling the progress of the meeting. In the process, the Chairperson should be adept at stimulating inquiry, assuring adequate discussion, guiding thinking, keeping the discussion on track, preventing premature action, sharpening judgment, and getting a clear-cut decision.
9. Making effective summaries of items discussed and decisions arrived at.

Here are some of the characteristics needed by the Chairperson in handling Board meetings:

1. Be able to think fast on his/her feet.
2. Be enthusiastic - it's contagious - it makes a meeting come alive.
3. Be tactful - stepping on toes of a participant can kill a discussion.
4. Be a planner - preparedness is essential to a successful meeting.
5. Be possessed of a sense of humor.
6. Be patient.
7. Be openminded and willing to accept ideas which don't always seem to fit.
8. Be flexible - knowing when to allow the group to change the subject and how to get them back.
9. Be respectful of the opinions of others.
10. Be friendly and informal.
11. Be able to summarize and evaluate.
12. Be even tempered.
13. Be sensitive to timing.
14. Be one who enjoys working with people.

Finally, there are a number of "Don'ts" for the Chairperson during meetings. Here are some of them:

1. Don't try to dominate the thinking of the group.
2. Don't restate a person's statement in a manner which changes its intended meaning.
3. Don't tell a member of the group he or she is wrong - let the group make that decision.
4. Don't instruct or lecture - ask questions instead.
5. Don't go so fast that others can't follow.
6. Don't argue, but you can disagree.
7. Don't ridicule.

8. Don't take sides.
9. Don't talk too much.
10. Don't try to be funny, but an appropriate humerous remark can sometimes help make a point or break the monotony of a boring discussion.
11. Don't set yourself up as an authority or expert.
12. Don't let anyone monopolize the discussion, including yourself.
13. Don't allow the group to waste time guessing about matters of fact.
14. Don't run overtime - stop and start on time.

But the Board Chairperson needs the help and cooperation of the other Board members if the meeting is to progress effectively. Here are some characteristics of a good trustee:

1. Responsible and objective - does not make statements or take actions not in the best interests of the college.
2. Evaluates problems and makes decisions, keeping in mind and respecting the approved goals, plans and priorities of the college.
3. Works for the establishment of programs and policies which are sound, attainable, and reflect the needs and desires of the community.
4. Makes decisions and evaluations on the basis of hard data, systematically accumulated, which provides reliable yardsticks for measurement.
5. Sees that an adequate data base is maintained to permit an on-going evaluation of goals, priorities, policies and activities.
6. Respects the dividing line between policy and administration, taking full responsibility for policy formulation, but avoiding dabbling into administrative affairs.
7. Serving as a representative of the college to the community, promoting the college always, building its reputation and defending the college where needed; on the other hand, the trustee serves as an information funnel from the community back to the college so that the feelings and expectations of the public are brought to full awareness of the college.
8. Being a team player; supporting majority actions of the Board even though not personally in agreement with them.
9. Works at keeping informed, attends meetings, participates in discussions, accepts special assignments and prepares in advance for Board meetings. (In other words, do your homework.)
10. Exercises discretion in dealing with sensitive matters.
11. Is willing to accept new ideas and concepts.

Need for Established Policies, Regulations, Data, and Documents

Perhaps the major key to effective Board meetings is the existence of well established policies, regulations, plans, objectives and priorities which serve as the framework or road map guiding the operations of the college and answering in a systematic manner, many of the questions which might otherwise consume a considerable amount of time during Board meetings in floundering over problems and arriving at valid decisions.

The existence of such "road maps or guides" assures consistency in handling many of the problems which arise and may even preclude the need for a particular item to be on the agenda. They minimize the number of items which need to come to the Board or at least minimize the time required during Board meetings in dealing with them.

Included among these documents are:

1. A well formulated and approved Board Policy Manual covering in considerable depth:

   (a) The legal basis for governance of the college.
   (b) Mission of the college.
   (c) Organization for management.
   (d) Personnel management.
   (e) Educational programs.
   (f) Service to students.
   (g) Use of facilities and equipment.
   (h) Board procedures.

2. Master plans for the physical and academic development of the college.
3. A personnel classification and pay plan together with personnel rules and regulations relative to hiring and firing, promotions, retirement, vacation, sick leave, travel expenses, sabbatical leave, discipline, working conditions.
4. A comprehensive statement of long and short term goals, objectives and priorities of the college.
5. A long term financial plan together with a well formulated comprehensive annual budget.
6. A comprehensive data bank which will, among other things, provide current information for the evaluation of student progress and success, not only while attending <u>that</u> college, but also upon entering the job market or transferring to another institution.

With the existence of well formulated and periodically updated plans, policies, goals, rules and regulations, coupled with sound data on operations, progress and accomplishments, the Board of Trustees has much of the information needed to analyze problems more quickly, and to make valid decisions when problems, situations or incidents arise. Under these conditions, Board actions will be more consistent and goals, objectives and priorities will be more likely attained. And lastly, more effective Board meetings - in less time - will result.

Your Job as a Trustee

How much time must one spend to be an effective Board member? Obviously there is no simple pat answer. It will vary with individuals, based upon their own backgrounds and ability to analize and assimilate a fairly large amount of information.

During the early months on the Board, one will need to devote a considerable amount of time. In my own case, I spent the better part of ten days reviewing and assimilating all of the information given to me and in discussions with staff personnel at the college. And even then, I did not have a firm, comprehensive grasp of all that was going on with the college's problems, goals, priorities, plans and accomplishments.

But I was, at that point, knowledgeable enough to participate intelligently in the deliberative process during meetings and make a contribution to them.

As a matter of fact, as time goes on, I frequently realize how much more I need to know about the college, to say nothing of the goals, problems and thinking in the area of higher education at the state and national levels.

Then there are the numerous internal and external publications with which the community college board member should be familiar.

Finally, in preparation for each of our monthly Board meetings, a number of reports, memoranda and other information necessitates review, analyses, and familiarization if our meeting is to be effective.

I normally spend four to six hours in preparation for the monthly Board meeting. But if your college is not blessed with the types of approved plans, policies, regulations and guidelines referred to earlier, additional time may be needed in preparing for Board meetings and additional time will probably be spent at Board meetings.

I am frank to admit that I could well spend more time on Board functions and, as a consequence, be a more effective Board member.

But one thing that I do not do, is spend time meddling in administrative affairs. In my opinion, this is not the function of the Board member and I religiously attempt to do my own job and to hold the President and his staff responsible for the job of administration.

In my opinion, only when the Board of Trustees understands its appropriate role in policy formulation and performance review, and holds the President and his staff responsible for carrying out those policies and reporting on performance, will an effective, efficient administration of the college result, or will there be effective Board meetings - in less time.

Better Board Meetings in Less Time

Janet Cartwright, Vice Chairman, BHC Board of Trustees

Ray has outlined the administrative system at Black Hawk which provides the frame work for effective board meetings and he also talked about the characteristics of a board chairperson, both of which are the foundations of a good board meeting system.

Since they are public forums, board meetings of community colleges and school districts have a tendency to run long and become unproductive if they are not controlled and managed, all in an effort to provide full and open debate to all participants. Today we hope to show you our system of preparing for and conducting board meetings which may assist your colleges in gaining better management of your meetings without necessarily cutting off any opportunity for full and open debate on issues.

A strong chairperson is desirable in a college board meeting but the role of the individual board member is crucial. He or she must be well prepared and well informed for the meeting, have thoughts in order about the agenda, and must come in with definite opinions on the issues. Since the chairperson often refrains from expressing opinions until all members have expressed their views, individual trustees must all articulate their views. (and not be led by _____)

AGENDA DEVELOPMENT

The board meeting of the community college (or any public body) is a primary communication forum in that institution. It is imperative to devise a good board meeting system so that this communication forum remains a respected one and one in which there is good interaction and free interchange of ideas from all parts of the college.

There are many other important groups meeting on a regular basis in the college in addition to the board: advisory groups composed of community representatives, faculty group meetings, union meetings, college committee meetings, and student group meetings.

Many college issues or problems are first discussed at these forums, and often can be resolved at these levels before reaching the board agenda.

The college board meeting should not attempt to make all the decisions in the college nor load the agenda with too many items or issues better discussed in a preliminary group before coming to the board.

So, in developing the agenda at Black Hawk, when the college president and the board chairman consider the make up of the next board meeting agenda, the question must be raised: should this issue

come before the board now: has it been clarified enough through college communication channels so that it is ready for a decision?

Meeting System

Our system of preparation for and the conduct of the board meetings has been shaped over the years as a 33 year old community college. It seems to flow naturally from the well defined and established board policies which have evolved over the years. As an older public community college we have had the benefit of more time to develop our administrative policies than have younger institutions.

One might even say that because of a finely tuned bureaucracy, Black Hawk College has achieved a model system for board meetings, reflecting the overall philosophy of management of the school. Later, in the discussion, perhaps we can address the pitfalls of being "too efficient." We want to create an atmosphere of good communication while keeping meetings under control.

At Black Hawk our board meets one time per month in regular session and occasionally there may be special sessions for background information on certain issues, and ad hoc committees meeting occasionally.

Good management practice tells us that groups need not meet on a strict monthly or weekly basis but rather when a meeting is necessary. But a public community college must develop a calendar for board meetings in advance, and be prepared to stick to those dates, allowing for emergencies.

We have found at Black Hawk that 12 regular meetings per year are necessary for good communication but not too frequent for college needs.

A board meeting, since it takes place in one evening, has an obvious time limit factor. You must be able to present the agenda, discuss it, make decisions, and allow for communication from the community, employees, and students all in one evening. When the hour becomes too late for most people who work all day to function, you have many problems; short tempers, clouded thinking processes, and often bad decisions as a result.

An efficient productive board meeting depends a lot on good college staff preparation. At BHC the Administrative staff, with the help of faculty and with advice from the board chairman prepares the agenda. The board chairman should receive communication on possible agenda items from the other board members. The president receives information on agenda items from faculty, students, and other administrators.

AGENDA SYSTEM

According to board policy, board members must receive their packet of board reports, agenda, and lists of bills at least 5 days in advance of a board meeting.

Also according to BHC policy, the board members must request an item on the written agenda at least 10 days in advance of a meeting. Other items may be introduced by either board chairperson or college president.

A similar 10 day rule exists for other groups who wish to be heard at a meeting of the board. The request must state the purpose and topic which the individual or group wishes to present. The hearing is held under a regular section of the agenda called "Miscellaneous."

At BHC, the administrative communication system uses numbered board reports and color coded sheets to differentiate printed material for board meetings and other communication between college and trustees.

The board reports are numbered in a fashion that permits easy reference by college and easy identification by anyone reading them. (examples) If written properly they should contain all necessary information needed on an agenda item for the board to make a decision.

Color Code

Blue: Agenda only. Used as meeting guide for all participants. Board report numbers appear on the agenda.

Pink: Board reports only. Supplemented with white sheets for additional data.

Green: Used for confidential memos for executive committee and board only, for issues under discussion by board only, not on agenda.

Yellow: Proposed Agenda- goes to board 2-3 weeks before meeting. A signal to board that other matters may be brought up by them at least 10 days in advance.

The color code system has proved an excellent tool. Other variations of this are used widely in industry as an executive communication system.

During the five day periods before the meeting, board members are expected to cover the board reports thoroughly to prepare for the meeting. Often clarification of a question can be done before a meeting. This is not to say that full discussion should not take place during the board meeting.

These board reports obviously take much staff preparation and planning - the key. At BHC we are convinced the time preparing them is worth it in smooth operation of the college in addition to smoother board meetings.

Board packets are also available to members of the college staff and faculty who desire to attend board meetings. Members of the press have full access to board reports and agendas. We think it advances the communication between college board and community.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Under the Illinois Open Meeting Law, BHC board meets in executive session for only the following:

Collective negotiation matters with employees
Acquisition of real property
Pending court proceedings
Matters of campus security, safety
Personnel matters
Student discipline
Matters of professional consultation/professional ethics

For a time-conscious board, it is advisable to carefully watch the time during executive session. (Chair resp.) This can be a major reason for lengthy meetings. If a regular meeting is to be conducted in 2 1/2 hours, the executive session should not run more than 30-45 minutes. If it does continually, it may mean there is a need for a separate meeting for executive session only - or too much is being discussed in executive session.

SPECIAL SESSIONS

Another reason meetings may tend to run too long is the fact that a public college board can legally get together and communicate only at regularly scheduled sessions. This is a time to both debate the issues and to make decisions, but primarily it is a decision making forum.

To more fully communicate both among selves and to the college president, a board should consider special sessions once or twice per year - retreat fashion, as well as ad hoc committees which Ray mentioned, which we prefer over standing committees.

Ad hoc committees: For in-depth analysis and discussion of major items -up to discretion of board chairman.

Special sessions: Board retreats, not public, provides good atmosphere for discussion of goals of college, future planning, and brainstorming on particular problems. Main purpose: to guide administration.

Finally, the good productive board meeting does not happen easily. It requires a solid administrative framework in the college, hard work in the form of communication by board members, guidance by the chairman, good staff work in preparation for the meeting, and also, a continuous flow of information to the board from the college so that board members know what is going on between board meetings.

We at BHC appreciate the opportunity to present our meeting system and hope some of the ideas talked about here will stimulate discussion at your board meetings back home.

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